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Segment on activities  
of U.S. mercenaries.  
Kwame Holman reporting.

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>U.S. MERCENARY>MACNEIL: Tonight we have a different view of the kind of warfare going on in Nicaragua, the view of mercenaries, American mercenaries. Correspondent Kwame Holman has the story.

HOLMAN: They call themselves soldiers of fortune, freedom fighters, mercenaries or mercs. They believe it's appropriate for Americans with military skills to, as they put it, 'work free-lance in foreign wars' mostly for anticommunist forces. There are hundreds of them here. Most are Vietnam veterans; many are policemen. They recently put on their camouflage uniforms and came to Las Vegas for a convention. They came to shoot, they came to check out the newest weapons, they came to simulate a hostage rescue and they came to honor two fellow soldiers of fortune who died last month in Nicaragua. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: I would submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, that the reason those people died is because they believe. We believe, don't we, ladies and gentlemen?

HOLMAN: The fact is that very few of these men actually go out and fight in foreign lands. But among the convention goers there was a handful of real, full-time mercenaries. One of them calls himself Dr. John. He lives in New York City and he's anxious to return to battle. DR. JOHN: There's exhilaration from knowing that every step on the general path might be your last. It's not duplicated in civilian life.

HOLMAN: Last year Dr. John organized this invasion force to overthrow the government of Surinam in South America. He also has fought against the government of Nicaragua. Right now Dr. John has put in bids to fight in three separate battles. He says his skills are very much in demand. DR. JOHN: What I in particular have to sell are my connections, my contacts in the world of munitions and arms and international transport and international banking.

HOLMAN: Before he became a mercenary, Dr. John was a clinical psychologist. But at age 43, he made a career change. Though he fights partly for ideological reasons, he also fights for money. Dr. John gets \$2,000 to \$5,000 a month, plus expenses, for his work. DR. JOHN: I believe in what I'm doing. I'm a private citizen actually impacting world events. There's a lot of reinforcement, a lot of gratification there. So the original impetus is altruistic. I have to make a living at it, of course, or I couldn't do it very long or I'd be crazy to do it.

HOLMAN: But is it legal to fight as a mercenary? Republican Congressman Jim Leach, who sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, says there are laws governing

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mercenaries. REP. JIM LEACH (R.-Iowa): Under the neutrality act, foreign or United States citizens are prohibited from planning to attempt to overthrow foreign governments or to engage in war from the shores of the United States.

HOLMAN: Potential mercenaries seeking advice on how these laws apply to them regularly turn to attorney Dana \*Jankowski, who has himself fought as a soldier of fortune. DANA JANKOWSKI: If you and your buddies get together and say, 'Hey, guys let's get together and go on down to Nicaragua and blow a bridge, you know, just for the fun of it and then come home,' you have now violated this law of engaging in an expedition against a friendly nation, because it was launched from the United States. What this means is, nobody can set up a conspiracy in the United States to go down to Nicaragua and drop mines in the harbor, for example. So the law specifically prohibits mercenaries from being recruited in the United States or from making plans while in this country.

HOLMAN: Those who practice the mercenary life have found ways to circumvent those laws. DR. JOHN: If I meet a client and we discuss, in general terms, their situation and my investigation proves that it is valid and then we're ready to move into the planning stage, we go to a foreign country to continue our business. LEACH: They've taken law into their own hands. They've become international vigilantes. And the question is whether the United States government wants to disassociate its policy from these individuals or not. (Video of Dr. John singing 'God Bless America.' )

HOLMAN: Dr. John says his fights are always in America's best interests and that the U.S. government always knows where he is. He hints that his pay is sometimes filtered through front organizations for the CIA or through governments friendly to the United States. On camera, he will make only one cryptic statement about his relationship with the U.S. government. DR. JOHN: There have been times when I've had intimate contact with employees of the United States government.

HOLMAN: Since the government has not cracked down on mercenaries, Congressman Leach believes the administration is undermining Congress' attempt to limit the number of U.S. personnel and dollars going to Central America. LEACH: When you have private citizens take war-making authority into their own hands and then when you have a government assist these private citizens, you have a real breakdown in the contract under our Constitution between the executive and the legislature. It's this constitutional issue that overwhelms all others by comparison.

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MACNEIL: One high-ranking official of the Reagan administration has denied that the government has anything to do with mercenaries. Robert McFarlane, the president's national security adviser, said on this program on Sept. 6, 'We do not condone and encourage, endorse nor facilitate this kind of thing.' McFarlane acknowledged that it can happen, but not with the encouragement of the United States government.